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2 **CLAIMS:**

3 What is claimed is:

1 1. A method for monitoring service tickets for
2 information technology service providers to ensure that
3 levels of service to a customer are met, the method
4 comprising:

5 inspecting a service ticket in a database to
6 determine a deadline for when a problem associated with
7 the service ticket must be resolved;

8 determining a deadline approaching alert time at
9 which a help desk user must be notified that the deadline
10 for resolving the problem must be met; and

11 alerting the help desk user that the deadline for
12 resolving the problem is approaching when the deadline
13 approaching alert time is reached.

1 2. The method as recited in claim 1, further
2 comprising:

3 determining a status update interval for the service
4 ticket; and

5 responsive to a determination that the problem has
6 not been resolved by the deadline, determining a first
7 status update alert time to alert the help desk user that
8 a status update needs to be sent to the customer.

1 3. The method as recited in claim 2, further
2 comprising:

3 alerting the help desk user that a status update is
4 approaching when the first status update alert time
5 occurs.

1 4. The method as recited in claim 3, further
2 comprising:

3 responsive to a determination that the problem has
4 not been resolved after a status update time has passed,
5 determining a time to alert the help desk user that a
6 time to provide a new status update to the customer is
7 approaching and alerting the help desk user prior to the
8 time to provide the new status update.

1 5. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein alerting
2 the help desk user that the deadline for resolving the
3 problem is approaching when the deadline approaching
4 alert time is reached comprises sending an alert wherein
5 the alert includes an identity of the service ticket and
6 the deadline for when a problem associated with the
7 service ticket must be resolved.

1 6. The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the alert
2 comprises a pop-up window.

1 7. The method as recited in claim 6, wherein the pop-up
2 window is displayed on top of all other windows that are
3 open on the help desk user's data processing system.

1 8. The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the alert
2 comprises an audio alert.

1 9. The method as recited in claim 5, wherein the alert
2 comprises a graphical alert.

1 10. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the
2 deadline for when a problem associated with the service
3 ticket must be resolved is determined by consulting a
4 ticket severity table.

1 11. The method as recited in claim 10, wherein the
2 ticket severity table is populated in accordance with a
3 level of service agreement between the customer and the
4 information technology provider.

1 12. A computer program product in a computer readable
2 media for use in a data processing system for monitoring
3 service tickets for information technology service
4 providers to ensure that levels of service to a customer
5 are met, the computer program product comprising:

6 first instructions for inspecting a service ticket
7 in a database to determine a deadline for when a problem
8 associated with the service ticket must be resolved;

9 second instructions for determining an deadline
10 approaching alert time at which a help desk user must be
11 notified that the deadline for resolving the problem must
12 be met; and

13 third instructions for alerting the help desk user
14 that the deadline for resolving the problem is
15 approaching when the deadline approaching alert time is
16 reached.

1 13. The computer program product as recited in claim 12,
2 further comprising:

3 fourth instructions for determining a status update
4 interval for the service ticket; and

5 fifth instructions, responsive to a determination
6 that the problem has not been resolved by the deadline,
7 for determining a first status update alert time to alert
8 the help desk user that a status update needs to be sent
9 to the customer.

1 14. The computer program product as recited in claim 13,
2 further comprising:

3 sixth instructions for alerting the help desk user
4 that a status update is approaching when the first status
5 update alert time occurs.

1 15. The computer program product as recited in claim 14,
2 further comprising:

3 seventh instructions, responsive to a determination
4 that the problem has not been resolved after a status
5 update time has passed, for determining a time to alert
6 the help desk user that a time to provide a new status
7 update to the customer is approaching and alerting the
8 help desk user prior to the time to provide the new
9 status update.

1 16. The computer program product as recited in claim 12,
2 wherein alerting the help desk user that the deadline for
3 resolving the problem is approaching when the deadline
4 approaching alert time is reached comprises sending an
5 alert wherein the alert includes an identity of the

6 service ticket and the deadline for when a problem
7 associated with the service ticket must be resolved.

1 17. The computer program product as recited in claim 16,
2 wherein the alert comprises a pop-up window.

1 18. The computer program product as recited in claim 17,
2 wherein the pop-up window is displayed on top of all
3 other windows that are open on the help desk user's data
4 processing system.

1 19. The computer program product as recited in claim 16,
2 wherein the alert comprises an audio alert.

1 20. The computer program product as recited in claim 16,
2 wherein the alert comprises a graphical alert.

1 21. The computer program product as recited in claim 12,
2 wherein the deadline for when a problem associated with
3 the service ticket must be resolved is determined by
4 consulting a ticket severity table.

1 22. The computer program product as recited in claim 21,
2 wherein the ticket severity table is populated in
3 accordance with a level of service agreement between the
4 customer and the information technology provider.

1 23. A system in a computer readable media for use in a
2 data processing system for monitoring service tickets for
3 information technology service providers to ensure that

4 levels of service to a customer are met, the system
5 comprising:

6 first means for inspecting a service ticket in a
7 database to determine a deadline for when a problem
8 associated with the service ticket must be resolved;

9 second means for determining an deadline approaching
10 alert time at which a help desk user must be notified
11 that the deadline for resolving the problem must be met;
12 and

13 third means for alerting the help desk user that the
14 deadline for resolving the problem is approaching when
15 the deadline approaching alert time is reached.

1 24. The system as recited in claim 23, further
2 comprising:

3 fourth means for determining a status update
4 interval for the service ticket; and

5 fifth means, responsive to a determination that the
6 problem has not been resolved by the deadline, for
7 determining a first status update alert time to alert the
8 help desk user that a status update needs to be sent to
9 the customer.

1 25. The system as recited in claim 24, further
2 comprising:

3 sixth means for alerting the help desk user that a
4 status update is approaching when the first status update
5 alert time occurs.

1 26. The system as recited in claim 25, further
2 comprising:

3 seventh means, responsive to a determination that
4 the problem has not been resolved after a status update
5 time has passed, for determining a time to alert the help
6 desk user that a time to provide a new status update to
7 the customer is approaching and alerting the help desk
8 user prior to the time to provide the new status update.

1 27. The system as recited in claim 23, wherein alerting
2 the help desk user that the deadline for resolving the
3 problem is approaching when the deadline approaching
4 alert time is reached comprises sending an alert wherein
5 the alert includes an identity of the service ticket and
6 the deadline for when a problem associated with the
7 service ticket must be resolved.

1 28. The system as recited in claim 27, wherein the alert
2 comprises a pop-up window.

1 29. The system as recited in claim 28, wherein the pop-
2 up window is displayed on top of all other windows that
3 are open on the help desk user's data processing system.

1 30. The system as recited in claim 27, wherein the alert
2 comprises an audio alert.

1 31. The system as recited in claim 27, wherein the alert
2 comprises a graphical alert.

1 32. The system as recited in claim 23, wherein the
2 deadline for when a problem associated with the service

3 ticket must be resolved is determined by consulting a
4 ticket severity table.

1 33. The system as recited in claim 32, wherein the
2 ticket severity table is populated in accordance with a
3 level of service agreement between the customer and the
4 information technology provider.

1 34. A system for monitoring service tickets in order to
2 provide reminders to a help desk user of impending times
3 for actions, comprising:

4 a monitoring server;
5 a database; and
6 a help desk client; wherein
7 the database stores tickets and information
8 regarding ticket types, ticket severities, and times for
9 actions to be performed for each of the ticket types and
10 ticket severities;

11 the monitoring server monitors tickets in the
12 database, determines when times for actions are
13 approaching, and sends alerts to the help desk client
14 alerting the held desk user that a time to take a
15 specified action is approaching; and

16 the help desk client displays active tickets to a
17 help desk user and provides alerts received from the
18 monitoring server to the help desk user.

1 35. The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the times
2 are determined using a centralized clock.

1 36. The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the
2 alerts comprise graphical alerts.

1 37. The system as recited in claim 34, wherein the
2 alerts comprise audio alerts.